

Lessons Learned from Kansas Specialty Crop Growers Report Available

The Kansas Rural Center (KRC) announces the availability of its latest report, Lessons Learned from Specialty Crop Growers Across Kansas. The 42-page report is a compilation of five previously published profiles of successful Kansas specialty crop growers, plus the proceedings of a one-day facilitated discussion in February 2018 between those experienced growers and five beginning specialty crop growers.

“Interest continues to grow among Kansas farmers and want-to-be farmers for ways to diversify their farms or to find new enterprises for the growing market demand for local, fresh fruits and vegetables,” stated Mary Fund, KRC Executive Director. “This report is a modest attempt to share information among growers, and to document what growers see as the challenges and needs if specialty crop production is to move forward in Kansas.”

Kansas only grows about 4% of the fruits and vegetables it consumes, which points to potential economic opportunity. Historically, Kansas grew many more acres of specialty crops until commodity crop agriculture took over most of those acres.

The Lessons Learned report is available online at the Kansas Rural Center’s website at website <https://kansasruralcenter.org/growing-under-cover/>. A limited number of hard copies are also available by contacting mfund@kansasruralcenter.org. Farmers profiled include Dave Svaty of Svaty’s Produce near Kanopolis, Frank Gieringer of Gieringer’s Orchard and Berry Farm near Edgerton, Chris and Christi Janssen’s C and C High Tunnels in Scandia, Dan and Kathy Kuhn’s The Depot Market in Courtland, and Nina and Jeter Isley’s Y Knot Farm and Ranch near Bird City in far northwest Kansas.

Most feature high tunnel or hoophouse production in addition to field production. Crops feature a full range of vegetables from salad greens, tomatoes, peppers and pumpkins to a variety of fruits: you-pick strawberries and other berries, and apples and peaches. More than one also direct market grassfed beef, lamb and chicken. One also raises certified organic grains and another conventional grain crops.

The report joins KRC’s trilogy of specialty crop guides: Growing Under Cover: Polyunnel Options (December 2014, Updated Oct. 2018); Growing Under Cover: A Kansas Grower’s Guide, 2016; and Growing Over Cover: A Kansas Specialty Crop Grower’s Guide to Cover Crops. All are available for download in color and/or black and white at KRC’s website <https://kansasruralcenter.org/growing-under-cover/>.

Hard copies are also available upon request for the Growing Under Cover: A Kansas Growers Guide.

The report was published as part of a project supported by the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and administered by the SCBG Program at the Kansas Department of Agriculture in Kansas.

Growing Over Cover: A Kansas Specialty Crop Grower’s Guide to Cover Crops is the latest publication in the Kansas Rural Center’s series of grower guides for fruit and vegetable growers in Kansas. The guide is now available for download on the KRC website, and a limited number of hard copies are available by contacting KRC.

Growing Over Cover was prepared with funding from the Kansas Department of Agriculture through the Specialty Crop Grant Program at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through Grant No. 16-SC-BGP-KS-044.

The guide is the third in a series of specialty crop guides prepared by the Kansas Rural Center in

collaboration with Kansas State University Extension. The first was **Growing Under Cover: A Guide to Polyunnel Options** that outlines the choices available for low and high tunnels, and how to select the right plastic tunnel or hoophouse option for you. Available at <http://kansasruralcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Growing-Under-Cover-0-FULL.pdf>.

The second guide is **Growing Under Cover: A Kansas Grower's Guide** that provides basic management strategies for hoophouse or high tunnel production, as well as enterprise budgets for seven major specialty crops popular in hoophouses including tomatoes, lettuce, spinach, cucumbers, peppers, leafy greens and root vegetables. It is available at KRC's website at <https://kansasruralcenter.org/growing-under-cover-a-kansas-growers-guide/>.

The Kansas Rural Center is a non-profit research, education and advocacy organization promoting a sustainable agriculture and food system.